

PROFESSIONAL **artist**

**Be a Lifelong
Learner**

PAGE 68

**Step up
Your SEO**

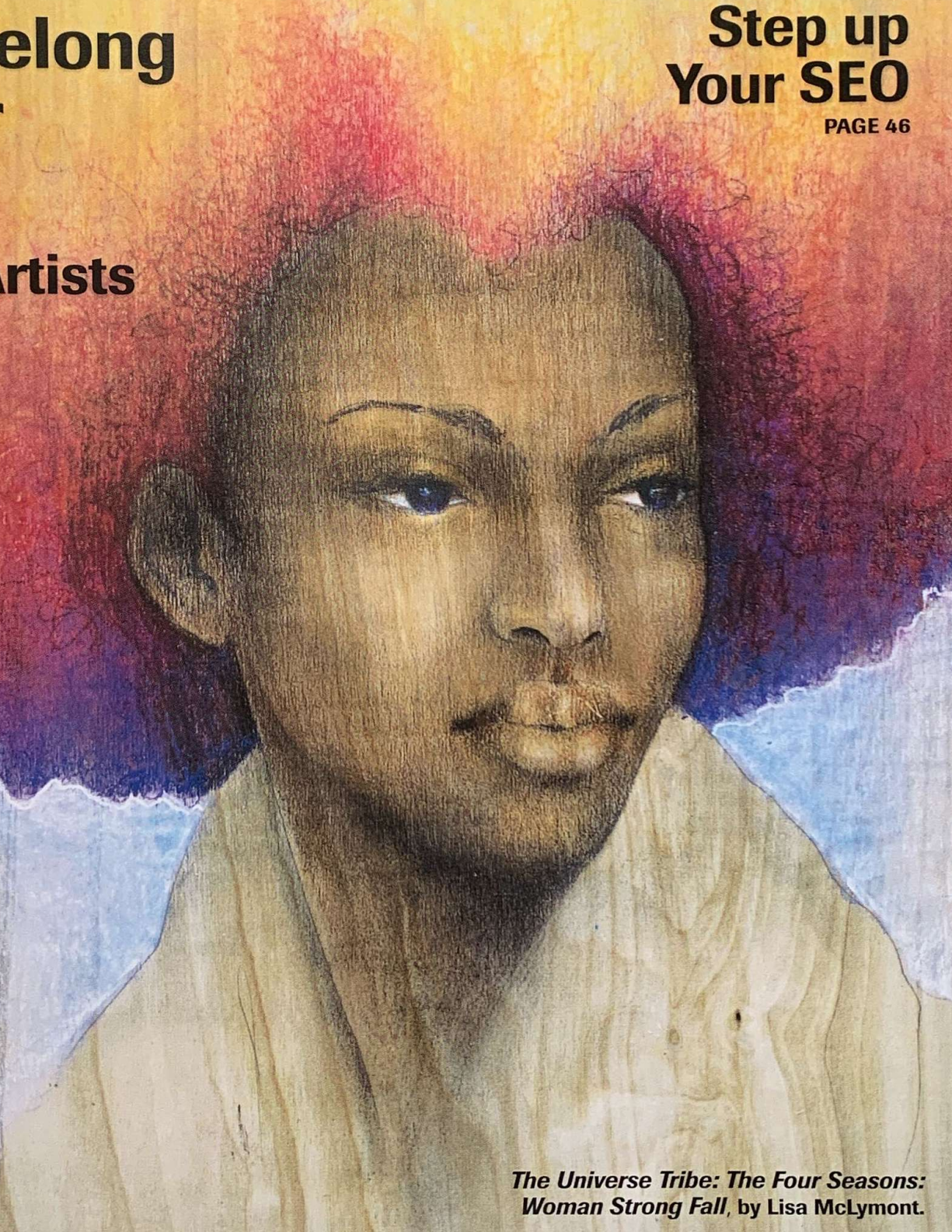
PAGE 46

**Custom Artists
Earn Big**

PAGE 40

**Back to
School
Your Way**

PAGE 24



\$7.95 US/\$11.95 IN CANADA

08>



*The Universe Tribe: The Four Seasons:
Woman Strong Fall, by Lisa McLymont.*

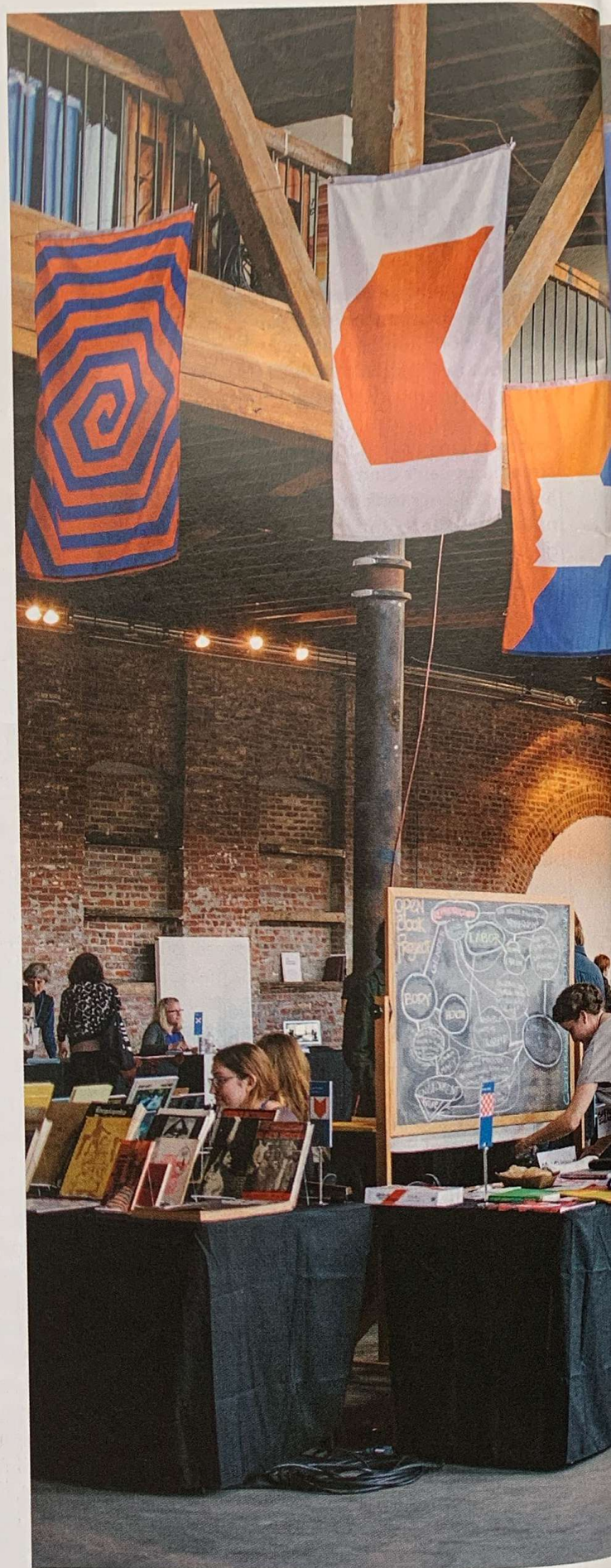
Alternative art schools are rising

BY JENNY A. BABCOCK

FREEFORM PROGRAMS ALLOW ARTISTS
TO CREATE WITHIN COMMUNITY

Rows of tables lined the cathedral-like main floor of Pioneer Works in New York last November for the first Alternative Art School Fair. Sunlight beamed in the floor-to-ceiling windows, filtering through the 50 customized blue, white and orange flags suspended from the ceiling of the former iron works factory.

About 800 attendees circulated around the tables, stocked with materials and representatives from 50 alternative art schools representing 11 different countries, including Egypt, England and Mexico. Each school had designed a flag to hang above its table, and it all reminded the fair's mastermind, Catherine Despont (catherinedespont.com), of a scene out of a *Harry Potter* film.





1

1 The 2016 Alternative Art Fair. Photo by Allyson Lupovich.

“It looked like Hogwarts’ dining hall,” said Despont, formerly the co-director of the education program at Pioneer Works (pioneerworks.org) and co-founder of the School of the Apocalypse (schoolofapocalypse.org). “There was a fun, festive feeling of the schools all being together.”

Alternative art schools have been multiplying over the last couple of decades. An exact number was unavailable but anecdotal evidence points to hundreds in existence across the world. While traditional art schools mostly share a single set of characteristics — classroom, teacher, students, structured curriculums and often a hefty price tag before a diploma can be secured — alternative art schools are more loosely defined.

At alternative schools, artists pursue their own concepts of what they want to create, learning from and often in collaboration with others. There’s usually no accrual of credits. The value system of grades usually becomes irrelevant — most of the organizations who participated in the Pioneer Works fair don’t award degrees or even certificates to artists. Some programs seem more like residencies, workshops or even “adult art camps.”

Alternatives by definition exist outside of established cultural, social or economic systems. So alternative art education is born out of people searching for something beyond the conventional system.

Cost is high on the list of reasons for not going the conventional route. According to a CollegeCalc analysis of U.S. Department of Education’s 2015-2016 IPEDS Survey, the average annual out-of-state total cost for a four-year bachelor program in Fine Arts and Art Studies is \$170,440. For associate programs, the average two-year cost was \$38,284.

The average annual wage for fine artists was \$57,410 in the United States as of May 2016 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics,



2



3

leaving many artists who do get a degree — or degrees — in fine art struggling for decades to repay their student loans.

Despont thinks there is a crisis in the way we value institutions. “We’re sending artists out into the world that are hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt that requires them to make money,” she said. “That changes the art that emerges and separates creativity. There’s a redefinition that needs to happen in funding education, in art making itself.”

2 El Weather Bureau, 2015, by Nibia Pastrana. Photo by Nibia Pastrana. 3 Poster for the 2016 Alternative Art Fair created by Pioneer Works.



Alternative art education is born out of people searching for something beyond the conventional system.”

~Jenny A. Babcock

4

The majority of alternative art schools do not rely on its students for its main source of funding. They charge a nominal fee or carry no cost at all, getting their operating budget through fundraisers and grants.

Beyond the dollar signs, Despont said, artists may pursue alternative education if they are searching for different ways of being creative and solving problems. “Everyone benefits with platforms that are open and allow different conversations to happen,” she said.

Here’s a snapshot of a few alternative art schools that attended the fair at Pioneer Works from the eyes of their students and faculty members.

Beta-Local // San Juan, Puerto Rico // Betalocal.org

Movement artist Nibia Pastrana Santiago (nibiapastrana.com) has been searching for alternatives for most of her adult life. When she was an undergraduate at the University of Puerto Rico, she knew she wanted to dance, but dance wasn’t offered. So she designed her own interdisciplinary studies program for dance performance and gender studies.

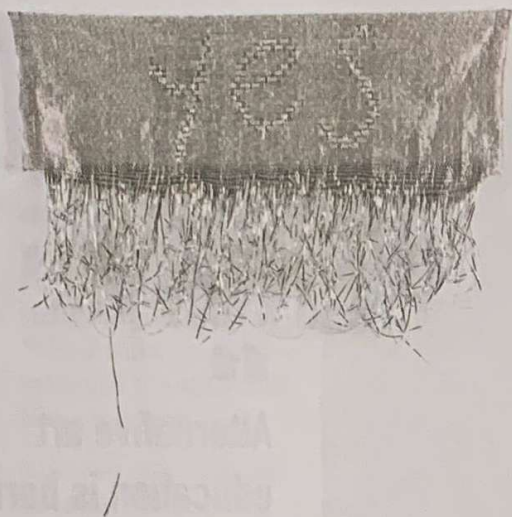
After getting a conventional MFA in dance at a state college in Illinois, she had unanswered questions. “I felt like I had a lot of things to ponder. I knew that I wanted to have a more fluid, self-directed space to pursue my own work. Some artists can do it in a studio, but I wanted a community, collective experience, even if there’s tension and failure,” Pastrana said.

When Pastrana returned to Puerto Rico, she got involved with Beta-Local, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and promoting aesthetic thought and practices. She accepted a spot in La Práctica, a nine-month research and production program for artists and other cultural agents, funded by grants.

She was given her own studio and met weekly with fellow artists. She designed her own project — a study of the choreography of the San Juan Bay — and had collaborators to help her with her research and the design of her large-scale event, featuring sounds, video and dance together inside an airport hangar by the bay. “All of this happened because I had the time to consider and reconsider my questions and interests,” she said.

“Beta doesn’t operate like any school model or university program,” Pastrana said. “There’s more reciprocity and exchange between the artists participating and the directors or coordinators, who are also artists. It feels like we are between colleagues.”

4 Students participating in Tim Kerr’s Mural Painting class. Photo by Suzi Sadler.



5

Ox-Bow // Saugatuck, Michigan // Ox-bow.org

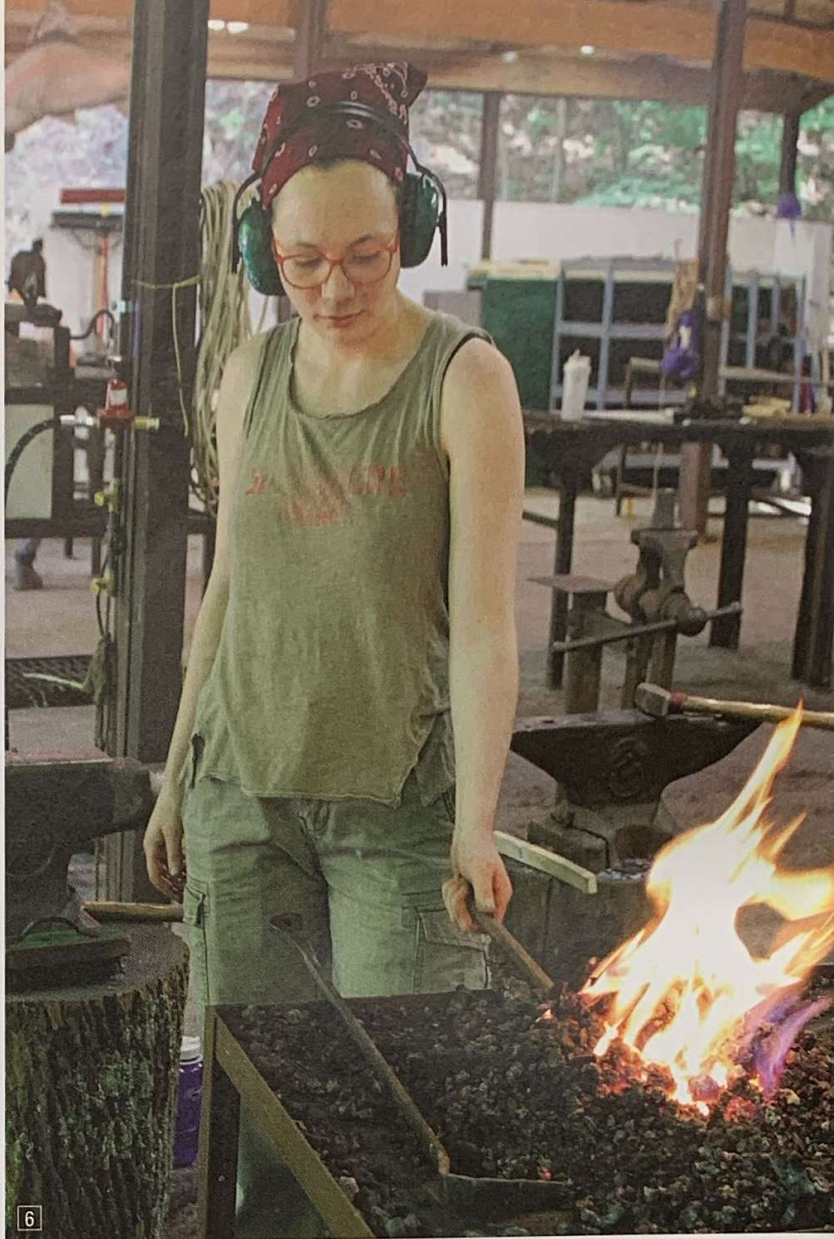
Ox-Bow, a riverside campus about a two-and-a-half hour drive from Chicago, creates a similar sense of community, but is structured as more of a supplement to a traditional art school education.

The campus, nestled in an old growth forest surrounded by dunes, offers skill-based technical courses like observational drawing, functional ceramics and glassblowing as well as content-driven courses that could include new media, performance and other hybrid practices, said Michael Andrews, summer academic advisor at Ox-Bow. Classes are offered in one- and two-week sessions.

Artist Etta Sandry (ettasandry.com), who spent three summers and a fall residency at Ox-Bow, said it's easiest to compare the program to "art camp" for adults; a place where faculty, professional artists and students live, eat, learn and create together for short periods of time.

"Ox-Bow is like a creative incubator," Sandry said. "It's a place where artists of all ages can go to develop their current practices or to explore something totally new while connecting and building relationships with each other."

Ox-Bow is affiliated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Students at SAIC receive college credit for the classes that they take at Ox-Bow, and the fee structures are the same. There is also a cost for room and board — work-study and scholarships are available to cover that additional cost.



6



7

"I think the programming at both institutions are complementary," said Andrews, who is also an assistant professor in the department of fiber and material studies at SAIC.

Sandry said Ox-Bow freed her to stray from the work she was doing in her studio or at SAIC, and to let go of any self-imposed rules or

5 YES, 2016, by Etta Sandry. Handwoven cottolin and mylar. Photographed by Jackie Furtado. Copyright © 2016 Etta Sandry. Used by permission of the artist.
 6 Ox-Bow student Gabrielle Egnater. Photo courtesy of Ox-Bow. 7 Ox-Bow students Rachel Van Wylen and Del Harrow. Photo courtesy of Ox-Bow.
 8 Students participating in School of the Alternative impromptu "Gas" class. Photo by Suzi Sadler.

fears. It “gave me the opportunity to explore creatively, try out new ideas, and fail in ways that I wasn’t able to during the rest of the year, which I think is an extremely important opportunity for the creative process.”

School of the Alternative // Black Mountain, North Carolina // Schoolofthealternative.com

“An experiment in education and community,” School of the Alternative (formerly Black Mountain School) holds two sessions each summer, each two weeks long, at the original campus of Black Mountain College. Each session is \$800, and they offer eight half-scholarships and three full scholarships per session.

The school is similar to an artist residency but with a focus on self-directed learning, said Heidi Gruner, co-director of the School of the Alternative. There are no prerequisites, no grades and no diplomas.

The students don’t fit any mold. “Our ideal student is someone who is looking for more,” the website states. “Maybe they are in an institutional four-year-degree and cannot decide on a major. Maybe they are a transient traveler, working service jobs to pay the bills. Maybe they have retired from working 30 years in a job that didn’t fulfill their real desires.”

Some classes are “solid” and some are “liquid,” where students can attend however many they’d like, Gruner said. Some are what they call “gas” classes where the teacher or student teaches



8

impromptu classes based on their passions.

“You experiment and learn in the woods with a group of strangers,” Gruner said. “Once we’re all here together, the result can be all sorts of magic.”

Guest teacher Tim Kerr (timkerr.net) designed his class to enrich the community of Black Mountain. “I realized that there was really nothing in the town that was celebrating the history of the school that had happened here,” Kerr said. “I suggested that we do a mural for the town.”

WE CHANGED SOME NAMES TO PROTECT THE INNOCENT.



GOLDEN Polymer Medium is now called Gloss Medium and Acrylic Flow Release is now Wetting Agent. Like the larger type and clearer descriptions on all our fluid mediums, gels, pastes grounds, varnishes, additives and topcoats, we changed a few product names to make it easier to find exactly what you need at the art supply store or in your studio - and avoid innocent mistakes. If the new labels still leave you with questions, visit our website or ask us directly by calling **800-959-6543** or sending an email to help@goldenpaints.com.

GOLDEN
ARTIST COLORS.

#GOLDENpaints

©2017 Golden Artist Colors, Inc. ■ New Berlin, NY ■ **607-847-6154**



Alt Life

Here's a list of alternative art schools from Pioneer Works' Alternative Art School Fair in November 2016.

- AAPG – Alternative Art Program Guatemala
- AltMFA
- Anhoek School
- Archeworks
- Arts Letters & Numbers
- ASCII Project
- Beta-Local
- School of the Alternative
- Brooklyn Institute for Social Research
- Center for Art Analysis
- COLLABOR
- école de Hogbonu
- Enroll Yourself
- Free School of Architecture
- Islington Mill Art Academy
- Grizedale Arts
- Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists' Residency
- NERTM - New Earth Resiliency Training Module
- Nomad/9
- Pioneer Works
- School of Apocalypse
- School of Critical Engagement - SoCE
- School of the Future
- School for Poetic Computation
- SOMA
- Sommerskolen
- Spring Sessions
- Sunview Luncheonette
- The Art & Law Program
- The Black School
- The Other MA - TOMA
- The Public School
- The School of Making Thinking
- The Southland Institute
- The Ventriloquist Summerschool
- Thinker Space
- Transart Institute
- Uncertainty School
- UNIDEE – University of Ideas
- Utopia School



9

School of Apocalypse // New York City // schoolofapocalypse.org

School of Apocalypse, which was developed at Pioneer Works, explores the connections between creative practice and survival through experiential and cooperative pedagogical frameworks.

"It is as much a school of thought and school of fish as it is a school of study," said Eugenia Manwelyan, co-founder of School of Apocalypse. "We are interested in how creative practices can help us explore and shape what is essential."

The participants are all ages with varied interests, Manwelyan said. The school "is completely free, and based on the principles of solidarity and mutual aid."

The school has working group sessions that last for three to four months. There are monthly meetings — discussions that start with an idea or prompt — and quarterly meetings — where working groups' proposals are presented to a large audience.

"An SoA working group is a vessel for creative collaboration," Manwelyan said. "It is a space for discussion, experimentation and it can take many forms; at its most basic it is a group that comes together around a theme, practice or project and meets periodically over the course of three months to create a final product/project and present it at the next SoA quarterly meeting."

IS ALT FOR YOU?

So is alternative the way to go, or is conventional still the most reasonable option? Or maybe a little of both? Sandry holds a bachelor's in fine art from SAIC, has spent time at alternative Ox-Bow and is about to start her MFA. She says there are advantages to all three paths, but it depends on what you value most.

"Alternative art education experiences like artist residencies can provide artists with the time and space they need to develop their work and to continue their practice at a much lower cost than traditional arts institutions," Sandry said.

"They can also often provide space for community building with other artists and professionals and lead to exhibition opportunities or other forms of exposure."

9 School of Apocalypse Second Sunday Trailer Talks, Pioneer Works, 2016. Photo Credit: Anice



Connecting & Sustaining Alternative Schools

The number of alternative schools has been on the rise, but many can only be found by those who know where to look.

"There are hundreds of alternative education projects throughout the world... but there's no real connective tissue in that landscape," Catherine Despont said. "You can't type in 'alternative art school' in Google and get something meaningful."

With the Alternative Art School Fair, Despont positioned Pioneer Works, an alternative art school itself, into an editorial role — recognizing the trend and working to get that information out to the masses. But, while it was helpful for individuals to get access to the schools, it was even more important, she said, for the schools to get access to other schools.

"I knew the schools needed each other. They are inventing the wheel on their own each and every time, and that's part of the fun, but it's super exhausting," she said. It can also lead them to be transitory in nature."

There is a plan to reconvene the schools that attended the fair at arts letters & numbers (artslettersandnumbers.com), a nonprofit arts, education and publishing organization in an old mill building in upstate New York. The meeting will take place in the fall to continue to build relationships and a set of best practices.

"People aren't really having the conversation about longevity and sustainability of these programs," Despont said. "They appear and disappear. It would be great to outline the steps to take to develop your own education program."

According to the Department of Education's list of all private for-profit, four-year or above programs with the highest net prices, the top three are art schools:

INSTITUTION	STATE	PERCENT RECEIVING GRANT AID	NET PRICE
Southwest University of Visual Arts-Albuquerque	NM	95	\$42,821
School of Visual Arts	NY	51	\$42,207
Southwest University of Visual Arts-Tucson	AZ	97	\$42,012

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2014, Institutional Characteristics component and Winter 2014-15, Student Financial Aid component. collegecost.ed.gov/catc/#

"However, if one feels they need a certain degree, like an MFA, to advance their career, wants to engage in a more rigorous curriculum structure, or work more closely with a particular artist or faculty, a more traditional institution might be the way to go. Additionally, colleges and universities often provide access to tools and resources, like specialty equipment and shops, that are difficult to access outside of a school setting."

School of the Alternative's Kerr advises folks to find something that interests them and then find others who are doing it. "Try to spend some time with them to learn what they might already know. You really will get more out of that sort of experience than a formal education."

Although Kerr is involved with alternative education now, he got his bachelor's in studio art at a state university. "I am not sure if it was worth the money, but I have no regrets on the money that was spent, or the money I am spending now, on my self expression," he said.

School of the Apocalypse's Manwelyan said she likes the way alternative education is integrated into your life. "It is not preparatory, as so many educational experiences position themselves. It does not train you and prepare you for a particular career. It becomes a part of what you already do, and can impact you in the moment. It gives you access to a community of shared values, and a variety of projects and experience. It offers a way to follow your curiosity down the rabbit hole.

"My most profoundly wonderful moments come when I give myself the time, and commit to a course of inquiry, and find that I'm not alone in my curiosities. For me, the partnerships that have emerged have been wonderful and empowering."

The ways in which we learn may be in constant flux, but at the end of the day, there's at least one intrinsic need that both conventional and alternative schools can fulfill: to be part of a community.

"Even though the tools and contexts that artists use continue to evolve and change at the core," Ox-Bow's Andrews said, "the need to connect continues to be very strong." **PA**

Jenny A. Babcock is the former assistant editor of Professional Artist. She's worked in journalism for the last decade (newspapers, magazines and now, public radio). She has a master's in business administration and a bachelor's in journalism from the University of Central Florida. Visit jennyababcock.com to learn more.